



The Holy See

HOLY MASS IN COMMEMORATION OF THE FALLEN

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Catacombs of Priscilla, on the Via Salaria

Saturday, 2 November 2019

[Multimedia]

The celebration of the feast of all the departed in a catacomb — it is the first time in my life that I enter a catacomb, it is a surprise — tells us many things. We can think about the lives of those people who had to hide, who had that custom of burying the dead and celebrating the Eucharist in here. It was a bad period in history, but one which has not been overcome. It continues still today. There are many of them. Many catacombs in other countries where people even have to pretend to be having a party or a birthday in order to celebrate the Eucharist as it is forbidden in that place. Today too there are many persecuted Christians, even more than in the first centuries; more. This — the catacombs, the persecution, the Christians — and these Readings make me think of three words; identity, place and hope.

The *identity* of those people who gathered here to celebrate the Eucharist and to praise the Lord is the same as that of our brothers and sisters of today in many, many countries where being Christian is a crime; it is forbidden; they have no rights. The same. The identity is the one that we have heard: *the Beatitudes*. The identity of the Christian is this: the Beatitudes. There is no other. If you do this, if you live like this, then you are Christian. “No, but look, I belong to that association, to the other ... I am with this movement ...”. Yes, yes all fine things but they are fantasies with respect to this reality. Your identity card is this [he points to the Gospel], and if you do not have this, all the movements to which you may belong and your memberships in others are useless. You either live this way or you are not Christian. Simple. The Lord said this. “Yes but it is not easy, I do not know how to live like this ...”. There is another passage in the Gospel that helps us better

understand this and that Gospel passage will also be the “great protocol” by which we will be judged. It is in Matthew 25. With these two Gospel passages, the Beatitudes and the great protocol, by living this, we will show our identity as Christians. Without this, there cannot be an identity. There is the pretence of being Christian, but not the identity.

This is the identity of the Christian. The second word: *the place*. Those people who came here to hide to be safe, and also to bury their dead; and those people who today celebrate the Eucharist in hiding in the countries where it is forbidden ... I am thinking about that nun in Albania who was in a re-education camp in the Communist era when it was forbidden for priests to administer the Sacraments. And this nun used to baptize them in secret. The people, the Christians knew that this nun administered Baptisms and mothers used to approach her with their babies. However, she did not have a glass, something in which to collect water. She did it with her shoes. She would take water from the river with a shoe and baptize them. The place of Christians is a bit everywhere. We do not have a privileged place in life. Some would like to have it. They are “qualified” Christians. But they run the risk of remaining with just the “qualified” and dropping the “Christian”. What is the place of Christians? The “souls of the righteous are in the hand of God” (Wis 3:1): the place of Christians *is in the hand of God* where he wants them to be. God’s hands which are wounded, that are the hands of his Son who wanted to take the wounds with him to show them to the Father and intercede for us. The place of the Christian is in the intercession of Jesus before the Father. In God’s hands. And there we are safe come what may, even the cross. Our identity [he points to the Gospel] tells us that we will be blessed if they shall persecute us, if they say something against us; but if we are in God’s hands, wounded by love, we are safe. This is our place. And today we can ask ourselves: Where do I feel safest? In God’s hands or in other things, with other securities that we “rent” but which in the end will fail, that do not have any solidity?

These Christians with this identity card who lived and live in God’s hand are men and women of *hope*. And this is the third word that comes to mind today; hope. We heard it in the second Reading: that final vision where everything is “re-done”, where everything is recreated, that homeland we will all go to. And in order to enter it, there is no need for strange things, there is no need for attitudes that are somewhat sophisticated. All that is required is to show the identity card: “It is fine, go ahead”. Our hope is in Heaven, our hope is anchored there and holding the rope in our hands, we steady ourselves by looking at the shore of the river that we must reach.

Identity: Beatitudes and Matthew 25; Place, the safest place: in God’s hand, wounded by love. Hope, the future: the anchor there on the other shore, but I am firmly clinging to the rope. This is important, always clinging fast to the rope! Many times, we will only see the rope, not even the anchor, not even the other shore, but cling to the rope and you will reach it safely.
